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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Program for Research on Private Higher Education (PROPHE), a program that seeks to build knowledge about private higher education around the world. The program focuses on discovery, analysis, and dissemination of information, as well as creation of an international base of trained researchers. The main mission of the PROPHE global network is scholarship. The program's initial topic, "The Global Growth of Private Higher Education," concentrates on identifying the scope, contours, and patterns of rapid expansion. A crucial goal is bolstering and revising the three general categories of private higher education growth and functioning developed in the literature so far: (1) cultural distinctions; (2) academic or socioeconomic advantage; and (3) demand-absorption. A recent development that merits particular attention is the surge in for-profit activity. Once it builds its knowledge base, PROPHE will turn increasingly to matters of policy. Some of the program's planned "outputs," data, publications, collaborative production, and training, are outlined. (Contains 13 references.) (SLD)

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Program for Research on Private Higher Education (PROPHE) Background Paper

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PROPHE Background

Daniel C. Levy

Rationale

Private higher education's enormous importance is increasingly clear. In most regions of the world, the extraordinary growth and potential of private higher education is major news, usually controversial. This privatization is one of the few matters in higher education that attracts immense interest beyond higher education itself.

Private higher education is a quintessential example of a U.S. tradition that has recently become a global phenomenon, striking in the developing and post-Communist world. As Japan and especially the United States have long-standing private sectors, Western Europe remains the only major region marginal to private higher education. Several African countries have recently seen sudden private growth and such growth has been even more dramatic in Eastern and Central Europe. In Asia, new private sectors emerge in certain countries while others have private sectors with large majorities of the higher education enrollment. Latin America overall has roughly 40 percent of its enrollment in the private sector sector, approximately double the U.S. percentage.

Furthermore, greater inquiry into private higher education is now essential for understanding and dealing with most of the other key concerns in higher education scholarship and policymaking. These include enrollment growth, access, massification, institutional and functional differentiation (especially involving "non-universities"), accountability, autonomy, evaluation, quality, finance and cost recovery, the "entrepreneurial university," and new partnerships involving business, government, and other actors (Clark and Neave 1992).

Private higher education must also be incorporated into general social science and policy consideration of evolving private-public relationships and partnerships (Boris and Steuerle 1999), including the balance and inter-penetration of three sectors: public, nonprofit, and for-profit (Salamon and Anheier 1998; Roth 1987). Private higher education is part of the overall reshaping of public-private and state-society relations. It is prominent for the strengthening society and especially its rapidly growing pluralism. It is thus often important for understanding the emerging shape of democracy, including its problems (e.g., severe stratification, weak states and limited rule of law).

Despite these rationales for study, the international scholarship is weak. This is true compared to two related topics that themselves merit further study: the privatization of public higher education and the multifaceted privatization of lower education levels. (PROPHE should enhance understanding of issues common to such topics.) There is almost no serious literature on private graduate education outside the U.S.-although such education grows rapidly. Only the U.S (Breneman and Finn 1978; Zumeta 1997) has much literature on any form of private higher education. The only two books with international scope on mainstream private higher education used information now twenty years old (Geiger 1986; Levy 1986a), though a more recent book examines private research centers (Levy 1996). Latin America is the sole region ever systematically studied.

Publications have proliferated in the last few years. Fortunately, the list includes a few publications of notable cross-national reach. Most useful is one edited volume (Altbach 1999), as well as a regional collection on Asia (Wongsothorn and Wang: 1995, with an updated account in progress). Useful in different ways are isolated pieces on particular countries, such as entries in Boston College's informative newsletter *International Higher Education*. Yet the bulk of proliferating work lacks a framework informed by prior work on private higher education, any comparative structure or data, or a social science base or concepts. Works often recite facts or "discover" tendencies that have previously been documented and explained (e.g., many "private" institutions have some publicness while many "public" institutions have some privateness) or attribute a development to particular national factors whereas the trend is common internationally (e.g., private concentration in certain fields of study). In description, analysis, explanation, and policy implications, PROPHE undertakes to help improve both the quantity and the quality of research.

Additionally, most of the writing that is not purely descriptive is polemical or focuses on advocacy. Common is an international agency pro-private position (as with the International Finance Corporation, associated with the World Bank) or a politically Left or nationalist position against private growth. PROPHE seeks to make much more room for disinterested and broad analysis.

PROPHE'S Role

It is against this background of subject matter of great importance, inadequately studied, that PROPHE emerges. PROPHE seeks to build knowledge about private higher education around the world. It focuses on discovery, analysis, and dissemination, as well as creation of an international base of trained researchers. PROPHE neither represents nor promotes private higher education. Its main mission is scholarship, which, in turn, aims to inform public discussion and policymaking.

PROPHE is a global network headquartered at the University at Albany, SUNY (State University of New York). It is directed by Daniel C. Levy, Distinguished Professor, SUNY. PROPHE's initial core project is "The Global Growth of Private Higher Education: Patterns and Roles." That project is complemented by a smaller project, "Building the Database on Private Higher Education." The smaller project is run jointly with Boston College's Center for International Higher Education. The Ford Foundation is the principal founder of both projects.

Scope: Topics

PROPHE contemplates the range of topics concerning private higher education globally but has several foci.

PROPHE's initial project, "The Global Growth of Private Higher Education," concentrates on identifying the scope, contours, and patterns of rapid expansion. Private growth often explodes on the scene unanticipated and unregulated, followed by considerable public anxiety and concern to understand and shape what is happening.

A crucial PROPHE goal is bolstering and revising the three general categorizations of private higher education growth and functioning developed in the main prior literature: (1) cultural (often religious) distinctions, (2) academic or socioeconomic advantage, and (3) demand-absorption (Levy 1986a; Geiger 1986). Those categories have proven largely accurate and useful, but insufficiently inclusive and insufficiently discriminating for the sharp proliferation and transformation of the last two decades.

Recent privatization has involved new variants and a great shift in the weight of prior patterns. PROPHE will identify the new as well as the evolving religious and other cultural orientations of private higher education. It will similarly identify the rare and difficult but noteworthy attempts to build academic excellence and the more common other forms of elite undertakings.

But numerically overwhelming in recent private growth are the commercially or vocationally-oriented, tuition-dependent, academically questioned institutions that are closest to the "demand-absorbing" or "mass" categories identified in earlier work but that stretch those categories and require much closer examination. Some are "demand-absorbing" but do not form the mass sector of higher education. Many are low quality by traditional standards and norms yet may provide useful, attractive, and often job-relevant education. Many are higher or "postsecondary" but not "university" education; or they may be officially labeled as "postsecondary" but not "higher education." Some flourish de facto yet cannot offer officially recognized degrees or lack accreditation. A key paradox to explore is how and why such private higher education often grows robustly while lacking widespread academic, organizational, or political legitimacy.

A related development, indeed an overlapping one, is the surge in for-profit activity. This involves both legally for-profit institutions and legal nonprofits that are behaviorally at least partly for-profit. Here is another example of a higher education tendency to be explored in light of broader societal tendencies, such as the commercialization of nonprofits (Weisbrod 1998). In some intriguing cases, for-profit colleges and nonprofit universities (public or private) have affiliated with one another. Such partnerships merit keen attention.

Likewise overlapping other new forms and demanding analysis before it can be incorporated into any

reconceptualization of private higher education growth and roles are various types of internationalization. Two prominent variants are the opening of branches in different countries by universities from abroad and the opening or takeover of multiple institutions by international business networks. All this is part of a globalization within and beyond higher education.

The concern with growth patterns leads to consideration of other topics. These topics include the roles of private institutions within the overall higher education system and society. Indeed, they include wide-ranging aspects of the finance, governance, and missions of private institutions. A thematic concern in examining all these matters is distinctiveness. On the one hand, this means distinctiveness between the private and public sectors of higher education and, for greater focus, between any private and any public subsector. On the other hand, it means distinctiveness among private sub-sectors or institutions. Distinctiveness will be juxtaposed to isomorphism, a tendency for institutions or sectors to emulate one another.

Once it builds the knowledge base, PROPHE will turn increasingly to matters of public policy. Country after country is struggling with finding appropriate policy for private higher education-often without any national historical precedent. "Best" policy will always depend on a variety of historical contexts, values, and interests. Nevertheless, the general public, policymakers, and experts should be able to count on a well-laid out template of options. PROPHE seeks eventually to identify major public policies specifically for private higher education and other major policies that affect private along with public higher education. This means analyzing key consequences, exploring how different policies are associated with different types of privatization and the different positive and negative roles that they play. A major problem with extant debate is the facile assumption that private higher education is basically one thing, which can be discussed and treated in one way.

Scope: Countries

PROPHE pursues the greatest possible global coverage. All countries are thus of interest. Regarding a range of data and laws, PROPHE and its Boston College partner seek to gather and disseminate data widely. However, feasibility, the pursuit of depth, and the desire to learn about large countries from different regions obviously require concentrated efforts in some countries more than others.

The first tier of countries proposed included China, Russia, South Africa, and Mexico. Each experiences rapid, vibrant, controversial private growth. PROPHE's country-based work-- in research, collaboration, and training-has started with the spectacular case of China and proceeded to Russia and South Africa. While the Mexican case remains prominent on PROPHE's ideal agenda, other countries have been added as key cases: Chile, Japan, and Poland. Several other countries are under consideration as second-tier cases, much depending on the appearance of talented young scholars and interested research institutions.

PROPHE includes the U.S. as a special case for its singular tradition, status, influence, and interest to others around the world. "Knowledge" about U.S. private higher education often amounts to myths and rarely accounts for the enormous internal variation in the U.S. private sector or for the evolving patterns with it. In turn, mostly ignorant of private higher education outside their country, U.S. scholars and policymakers often assert a uniqueness that is now history. PROPHE aims both to "use" the U.S. case and to help make work on the U.S. become broader and stronger in theory. A particular emphasis interest lies in identifying and analyzing similarities between patterns dominant within a sub-sector of the U.S. case (usually not the elite private universities) and a national case elsewhere.

Outputs: Data and Publications

PROPHE gathers data from around the world. Indeed PROPHE solicits data and welcomes contacts, inquiries, and information from all countries. The data include quantitative, legal, and other forms. The top tier countries should provide the most extensive and systematic data, those most analyzed in collaboration between affiliated scholars and PROPHE's Albany headquarters. PROPHE endeavors there to build a reasonably cohesive base of essential data. More than that, it endeavors to build analytical perspective in those cases as well as to draw well-informed cross-national comparisons. Information will also be culled from various international agencies and databases.

The "Building the Database" joint project with Boston College concentrates on the accumulation of "raw data," though PROPHE will provide intellectual and comparative context for the data. The web is central to that project.

The web also plays a major part for PROPHE overall. Its roles include:
§ identifying PROPHE's major activities
§ helping in data gathering
§ disseminating statistics, laws, and other "raw" information
§ providing methodological, conceptual frameworks, and bibliographic listings
§ providing working papers
§ highlighting pertinent activities and events
§ linking viewers to sites, data, publications, organizations, and people in specific countries
§ attracting and connecting scholars as well as research centers
§ informing interested citizens and policymakers

The anticipated flow of publications will shift over time, increasing in volume as research findings accumulate. Because of the enormity of the subject matter and the scant coverage to date, early publications will emphasize working papers.This allows PROPHE to disseminate findings and gain feedback before publishing more in journals and edited volumes. Ultimately a centerpiece book by PROPHE's director would aim at a wide and diverse international audience including scholars in higher and comparative education, nonprofit sectors, and political sociology, and citizens and policymakers internationally.

PROPHE publications seek to build the knowledge base about private higher education globally. They seek to improve information, conceptualization, theorizing, and cross-national comparison. Translations of key works are then important to scholarly exchanges and wider dissemination.

Outputs: Collaborative Production and Training
PROPHE's mission in data and publications overlaps its mission in building the base of scholars researching private higher education. PROPHE's production depends mostly on junior scholars and doctoral students in top tier and other countries. PROPHE frameworks, checklists, surveys, typologies, theories, comparative databases, and expertise should guide their data gathering, fieldwork, and case studies, contributing to both the quality and integration of literature. Co-authorship among junior scholars and between them and PROPHE's director further enhances such ends. So should country or regionally based edited books.Where feasible, PROPHE will work collaboratively with partner centers in major countries regarding discovery, dissemination, and training.

Training and capacity building inevitably vary according to the particular personnel and academic units in individual countries, but ongoing mentoring involves methodological guidance and critiques of written work. PROPHE's global network helps integrate and benefit junior scholars and academic and policy units from different countries.Supervised by PROPHE's director, a group of collaborative scholars thus exchanges materials, composes and comments on matters of common concern, and develops international perspectives. PROPHE also lends support for the design and seeking of funds for country projects linked to the global network. All such activity should build comparative higher education research capacity generally.

Further training and capacity building comes through doctoral study at the University at Albany. PROPHE provides students the opportunity to link to its global network of scholars, attend conferences, and conduct field research back in one's home country. PROPHE also provides contact with comparative higher education programs at both Boston College and the University at Buffalo, SUNY. Mostly, PROPHE is centered at the University's Department of Educational Administration and Policy Studies, and this provides students an extraordinary faculty for globally oriented policy study, with extensive experience from international agency as well as university settings.

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